

§§ 656.4–656.9 [Reserved]

PART 657—PRIME AND UNIQUE FARMLANDS

Subpart A—Important Farmlands Inventory

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Subpart A—Important Farmlands Inventory

§657.1 Purpose.

NRCS is concerned about any action that tends to impair the productive capacity of American agriculture. The Nation needs to know the extent and location of the best land for producing food, feed, fiber forage, and oilseed crops. In addition to prime and unique farmlands, farmlands that are of statewide and local importance for producing these crops also need to be identified.

§657.2 Policy.

It is NRCS policy to make and keep current an inventory of the prime farmland and unique farmland of the Nation. This inventory is to be carried out in cooperation with other interested agencies at the National, State, and local levels of government. The objective of the inventory is to identify the extent and location of important rural lands needed to produce food, feed, fiber, forage, and oilseed crops.

§657.3 Applicability.

Inventories made under this memorandum do not constitute a designation of any land area to a specific land use. Such designations are the responsibility of appropriate local and State officials.

§657.4 NRCS responsibilities.

(a) *State Conservationist.* Each NRCS State Conservationist is to:

(1) Provide leadership for inventories of important farmlands for the State, county, or other subdivision of the State. Each is to work with appropriate agencies of State government and others to establish priorities for making these inventories.

(2) Identify the soil mapping units within the State that qualify as prime. In doing this, State Conservationists, in consultation with the cooperators of the National Cooperative Soil Survey, have the flexibility to make local deviation from the permeability criterion or to be more restrictive for other specific criteria in order to assure the most accurate identification of prime farmlands for a State. Each is to invite representatives of the Governor's office, agencies of the State government, and others to identify farmlands of statewide importance and unique farmlands that are to be inventoried within the framework of this memorandum.

(3) Prepare a statewide list of:

(i) Soil mapping units that meet the criteria for prime farmland;

(ii) Soil mapping units that are farmlands of statewide importance if the criteria used were based on soil information; and

(iii) Specific high-value food and fiber crops that are grown and, when combined with other favorable factors, qualify lands to meet the criteria for unique farmlands. Copies are to be furnished to NRCS Field Offices and to National Soil Survey Center. (see 7 CFR 600.2(c), 600.6)

(4) Coordinate soil mapping units that qualify as prime farmlands with adjacent States, including Major Land Resource Area Offices (see 7 CFR 600.4, 600.7) responsible for the soil series. Since farmlands of statewide importance and unique farmlands are designated by others at the State level, the soil mapping units and areas identified need not be coordinated among States.

(5) Instruct NRCS District Conservationists to arrange local review of lands identified as prime, unique, and additional farmlands of statewide importance by Conservation Districts and representatives of local agencies. This review is to determine if additional farmland should be identified to meet local decisionmaking needs.

(6) Make and publish each important farmland inventory on a base map of national map accuracy at an intermediate scale of 1:50,000 or 1:100,000. State Conservationists who need base maps of other scales are to submit their requests with justification to the Chief for consideration.

(b) *National Soil Survey Center.* The National Soil Survey Center is to provide requested technical assistance to State Conservationists and Major Land Resource Area Offices in inventorying prime and unique farmlands (see 7 CFR 600.2(c)(1), 600.4, 600.7). This includes reviewing statewide lists of soil mapping units that meet the criteria for prime farmlands and resolving coordination problems that may occur among States for specific soil series or soil mapping units.

(c) *National Office.* The Deputy Chief for Soil Survey and Resource Assessment (see 7 CFR 600.2(b)(3)) is to provide national leadership in preparing guidelines for inventorying prime farmlands and for national statistics and reports of prime farmlands.

[43 FR 4031, Jan. 31, 1978, as amended at 65 FR 57538, Sept. 25, 2000]

§ 657.5 Identification of important farmlands.

(a) *Prime farmlands—(1) General.* Prime farmland is land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops, and is also available for these uses (the land could be cropland, pastureland, rangeland, forest land, or other land, but not urban built-up land or water). It has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to economically produce sustained high yields of crops when treated and managed, including water management, according to acceptable farming methods. In general, prime farmlands have an adequate and dependable water supply from precipitation or irrigation, a favorable temperature and growing season, acceptable acidity or alkalinity, acceptable salt and sodium content, and few or no rocks. They are permeable to water and air. Prime farmlands are not excessively erodible or saturated with water for a long period of time, and they either do not flood

frequently or are protected from flooding. Examples of soils that qualify as prime farmland are Palouse silt loam, 0 to 7 percent slopes; Brookston silty clay loam, drained; and Tama silty clay loam, 0 to 5 percent slopes.

(2) *Specific criteria.* Prime farmlands meet all the following criteria: Terms used in this section are defined in USDA publications: "Soil Taxonomy, Agriculture Handbook 436"; "Soil Survey Manual, Agriculture Handbook 18"; "Rainfall-erosion Losses From Cropland, Agriculture Handbook 282"; "Wind Erosion Forces in the United States and Their Use in Predicting Soil Loss, Agriculture Handbook 346"; and "Saline and Alkali Soils, Agriculture Handbook 60."

(i) The soils have:

(A) Aquic, udic, ustic, or xeric moisture regimes and sufficient available water capacity within a depth of 40 inches (1 meter), or in the root zone (root zone is the part of the soil that is penetrated or can be penetrated by plant roots) if the root zone is less than 40 inches deep, to produce the commonly grown cultivated crops (cultivated crops include, but are not limited to, grain, forage, fiber, oilseed, sugar beets, sugarcane, vegetables, tobacco, orchard, vineyard, and bush fruit crops) adapted to the region in 7 or more years out of 10; or

(B) Xeric or ustic moisture regimes in which the available water capacity is limited, but the area has a developed irrigation water supply that is dependable (a dependable water supply is one in which enough water is available for irrigation in 8 out of 10 years for the crops commonly grown) and of adequate quality; or,

(C) Aridic or torric moisture regimes and the area has a developed irrigation water supply that is dependable and of adequate quality; and,

(ii) The soils have a temperature regime that is frigid, mesic, thermic, or hyperthermic (pergelic and cryic regimes are excluded). These are soils that, at a depth of 20 inches (50 cm), have a mean annual temperature higher than 32° F (0° C). In addition, the mean summer temperature at this depth in soils with an O horizon is higher than 47° F (8° C); in soils that have no O horizon, the mean summer